

Gorbachev Asks Lithuania To 'Annul' Independence

Soviet President Warns of 'Grave Consequences'

By David Remnick
Washington Post Foreign Service

MOSCOW, March 31—Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev today urged the Lithuanian leadership to "immediately annul" its March 11 declaration of independence and said that only such a step could avoid "grave consequences" and open the way to negotiations between Vilnius and Moscow.

Gorbachev sent separate appeals to the Lithuanian people and to the parliament just hours after Soviet troops increased the prolonged campaign of pressure in Vilnius, the Lithuanian capital, stationing troops in the offices of the chief prosecutor and a newspaper printing plant. Troops had already taken up posts in the republic's Communist Party headquarters and other party buildings.

"If the voice of reason is not heeded now, developments can have grave consequences for all of us," Gorbachev warned. "We must be united in striving to prevent this."

Speaking by telephone from Vilnius, Lithuanian President Vytautas Landsbergis said Gorbachev's conditions for negotiations

were unacceptable, calling the Soviet leader's language "unexpectedly harsh."

"We are repeatedly offering to speak with Moscow, but no one comes forward," Landsbergis said during a break in the Lithuanian parliament's evening session. "We are simply in no position to void our own legal sovereignty. That would be absurd."

He compared Gorbachev's statement to a similar appeal issued last August in which the Communist Party leadership in Moscow accused "separatists" in the three Baltic republics of Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia of driving the country to the "abyss." Landsbergis said the Baltic republics had appealed to the United Nations for help at that time but got no reply.

"How the world reacts now, we'll have to see," he said. U.S. Embassy officials in Moscow handed the Soviet Foreign Ministry a message Friday from President Bush supporting Lithuanian self-determination, but Washington has not formally recognized the newly proclaimed Lithuanian government.

In issuing his appeals today, it is unlikely

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Gorbachev Issues Lithuanian Appeal

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that Gorbachev expected Landsbergis to suddenly repeal the declaration of independence and the formation of the government that followed. Instead, the appeals appeared to be designed to speak over Landsbergis's head to the Lithuanian people and perhaps to more clearly define Moscow's position before putting more pressure on the republic.

Gorbachev said the new Lithuanian parliament's "unilateral" declaration of independence "openly challenges and insults the entire nation. This road is ruinous and will only lead to a dead end."

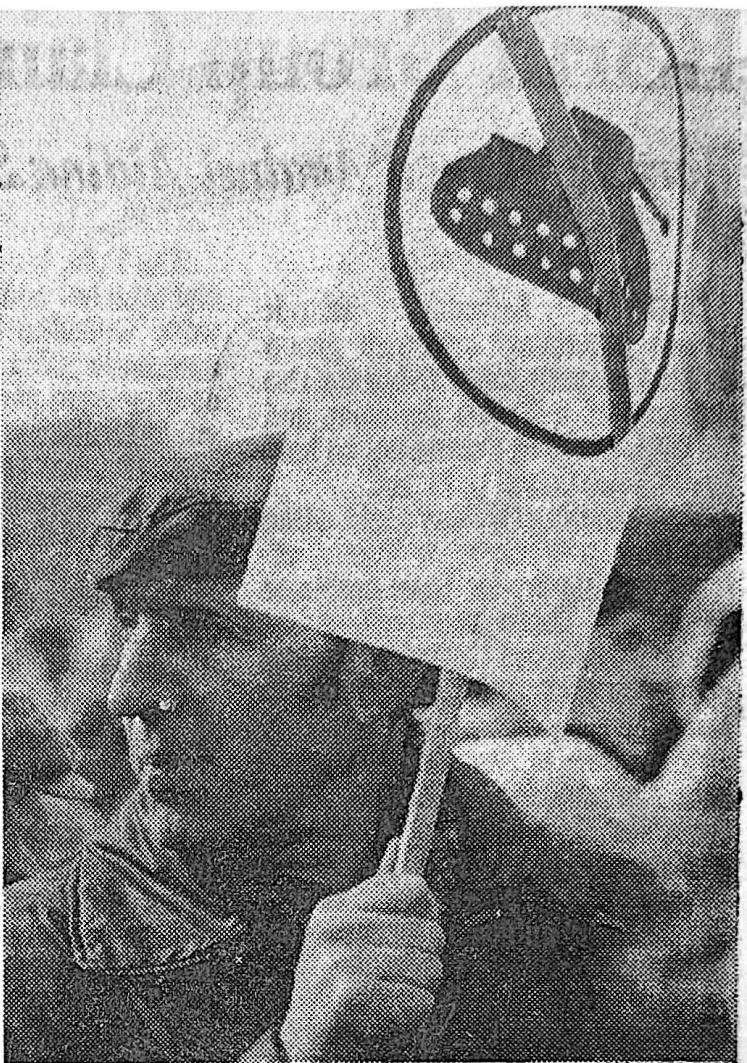
Sources in Moscow and Vilnius said Gorbachev may increase the pressure by declaring "presidential rule" in Lithuania and voiding the work of the newly elected republican parliament.

Lithuanian officials said privately that while the parliament would not repeal its assertion of independence, it could consider issuing an additional document declaring that the republic was in a "transitional stage." Such a declaration might provide some opening to Moscow.

"We've never denied that we were in a period of transition," Landsbergis said. "We know that we have to transfer economic mechanisms over time, and we know that questions of Soviet military presence on Lithuanian territory have to be discussed. We never said it was going to be immediate. But the problem so far is that we have no one with whom we can negotiate these questions."

Landsbergis also appears to have softened his stance on the question of holding a referendum on independence in the republic. Until now, he has refused but today said a referendum is possible "depending on how the question is posed. We could in some form ask, 'Has the Lithuanian parliament acted correctly or not?'"

Gorbachev said the Soviet constitution remained val-



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Pro-Lithuanian independence demonstrator holds sign of opposition to recent Soviet military moves in the republic.

id on Lithuanian territory and that discussions of sovereignty had to be within the framework of Soviet law. In private meetings with Lithuanian officials, he has insisted that a referendum be a precondition to any discussion of secession.

"We have lived for years in one home," Gorbachev said in his direct appeal to the Lithuanian people. "Does the past deserve only bad words? Have Lithuanian literature and poetry, theater and cinema, architecture and music, education and sports faded and gotten lost in the multi-colored Soviet culture?" he said.